

FROM : AT ETEP

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IN CELEBRATION OF INDEPENDENCE

I am an Indonesian-American. I was born in Jakarta, and received my early education there. I am the son of an Indonesian pastor who was imprisoned and executed by the Japanese forces occupying Java during World War II.

I remember with pride and joy the day in 1945 when Indonesian independence was proclaimed -- after over 300 years of colonial rule that was often barbarous and always demeaning.

On August 17, 1995, I will join with Indonesians throughout the world in celebration of the 50th anniversary of our independence. I will remember those who sacrificed their lives so that we could be truly free.

But even as I celebrate this happy event, I cannot forget East Timor.

On December 7, 1975, Indonesian armed forces invaded East Timor. They are still there. Over 200,000 East Timorese have died as a result of the invasion and occupation. I know. I have met some of the survivors. I have interviewed the witnesses.

To me, it is sadly ironic that Indonesia, an international advocate for Asian and African self-determination, is now itself a colonial power. The beloved country of my birth, that once endured an unjust occupation, is now the cruel oppressor of a tiny neighbor nation.

What is being done in East Timor -- in our name -- is totally contrary to the spirit of democracy and the innate decency of the Indonesian people. It happens only because the present Indonesian government has kept the truth about East Timor from the Indonesian people.

When Indonesians learn the truth, they react with shock, horror, and deep sorrow. Many speak out about East Timor, often at great personal risk. Some of the most ardent champions of self-determination for East Timor are Indonesians.

This may surprise non-Indonesians, but it does not surprise me. I know my own people, and I remember August 17, 1945 -- the beginning of "merdeka" (freedom).

I believe that just as Indonesia won its independence, East Timor will also be free one day. Indonesians -- who once knew the pain that East Timor now endures -- will insist that their government end this dark chapter in Indonesian history and withdraw from East Timor.

Please help free East Timor. This is our cause too.

-- Rev. Max Surjadinata
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